

# TEAMS Turns Around the New York City Correction Department

## A REVOLUTION IN JAIL

management has taken place in the last 5 years within the nation's largest municipal jail system, the New York City Correction Department. In 1994, the agency was under siege. Inmate violence was rampant. The Bloods, Latin Kings, and other gangs were openly recruiting members. Overtime costs were spiraling toward \$100 million per year. The absence rate among the Department's 13,000 employees was the highest in the city. Morale was virtually non-existent. Editorials routinely called for overhauling the jail system. In 1994, his first year as Mayor, Rudolph W. Giuliani appointed new take-charge leadership to the Department. Now that sprawling municipal jail system is hailed as a model for others to emulate.

Prior to 1994, inmate-on-inmate slashing and stabbing incidents averaged more than 100 per month, with many months recording as many as 160. Yearly totals ranged from 1,200 to more than 1,500 incidents. By 1998, the 12-month tally had been cut to 229, an 85 percent reduction. For the first 9 months of FY99, the total stands at 77 slashings/stabbings, a pace that will almost guarantee a more than 50 percent reduction from the previous year. Similarly, employee overtime has been cut by 45 percent and sick leave by 25 percent. An esprit de corps has been

restored to the staff. Today, they proudly refer to themselves as "New York's Boldest."

This dramatic turnaround is all the more remarkable when you consider that it occurred as the inmate population grew by 25 percent and that the changes were brought about by agency management—not by outside monitors, court orders, or consent decrees. What exactly occurred?

## THESE SUCCESSES FLOW,

in largemeasure, from anew management initiative called TEAMS—the Total Efficiency Accountability Management System—introduced by Commissioner Bernard B. Kerik. The TEAMS theory is that every unit within the Department affects how the agency performs its mission as a whole. Managers must be agency-focused, not narrowly unit-oriented, and they must be aware of and participate together in realizing the agency's goals and objectives.

Prior to the implementation of TEAMS, management within the Department had become a dispersed arrangement that blurred lines of accountability between

uniformed staff and civilian managers as well as on-site facility managers and headquarters personnel. Under TEAMS, accountability is clearly defined throughout the chain of command. A monthly primary indicator reporting system has been developed for all aspects of agency operations, from violence incidents to routine maintenance procedures. Monthly meetings involving all managers are held to discuss facility conditions, identify problem areas, and develop strategies for achieving objectives.

One morning each month a large conference room on Rikers Island fills up with the agency's entire top management. Seated beneath huge overhead projection screens are some 100 uniformed and civilian executives. These administrators supervise 11,300 uniformed and 1,600 civilian correctional staffers, 130,000 annual inmate admissions, and an \$830 million operating budget. Regardless of their rank, latecomers are not admitted once the conference room door closes at precisely 8:00 a.m. This no-tolerance policy on lateness typifies the business-like approach to the TEAMS sessions.

At a raised dais facing the assembled staff sit the Commissioner, First Deputy Commissioner, and Chief of the Department. At the other end of the room, wardens and their top deputies stand at a podium and respond to questions from the dais. Questions focus on such concerns as security, inmate services, building maintenance, administration, staff morale and integrity, and compliance with statutory

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and other mandatory standards. Typically, the executive staff from four of the Department's 16 jails are called to the meetings, which usually run 2 to 3 hours. Problem areas are discussed in detail; managers are expected to know the cause of the problem and to state a plan for corrective action.

### **A REPORT OF PRIMARY**

indicators drives the meetings. These indicators cover 90 separate components—the list keeps growing—of jail operations. In developing this report system, indicators were established for all facility managers. These indicators were standardized throughout the chain of command, and managers were required to verify and sign off on their report submissions. Computer programs were then developed to allow for instant documentation and review of all operational indicators. This “real time” data collection method provides management with the all-important capacity to conduct ongoing analysis and to mount an immediate response to trouble areas.

The process is not simply data gathering for the sake of having impressive numbers or producing decorative charts for the historical record. This number-crunching has become a core activity in the new way the Department manages its vast jail system: detecting, tracking, and dealing with trends on a daily basis—before they can become problems and crises. Revamping the information collection process was important because prior systems enabled managers to analyze information only on a monthly or, most commonly, a quarterly basis. But, given the inmate population's short length of stay, the information being collected was stale and too obsolete to be of practical

use. Armed with the new, real-time data and analysis, Commissioner Kerik holds the assembled managers to account, asking them to explain in detail any positives or negatives suggested by the indicator report. The open dialog and discussions at the TEAMS sessions provide a focus for all Department executive staff on common problems, issues, or concerns.

“TEAMS ends the isolation that used to be the rule, the feeling some wardens had that they are on their own without any supportive structure,” Commissioner Kerik explains. “Gone are the days when each warden ran the jail his or her way because there was no collective approach. The previous situation tended to make for 16 jail systems, one at each jail. TEAMS makes for one city-wide system because we have brought the managers into a system-wide management process. By opening up these operation reviews to the entire top executive force, we foster their thinking in terms of Department management, not just each one's little corner of it.” While seeking to do away with “turf management” thinking, TEAMS nevertheless encourages the executives to apply Department-wide management thinking to their turfs. Holding managers accountable for what is going on under their watch is an essential element. While the structure opens a Department-wide perspective for managers, it also zeroes in on them in front of their peers.

### **SUCCESSSES ARE ALSO**

reviewed. At one meeting, a warden who had dramatically reduced violence at his jail was asked how this decline was achieved. He explained that by analyzing the violent incidents that had occurred in his jail, he found that a majority were linked to an extortion scheme run by a

small group of inmates. He then implemented midnight cell searches and, armed with a commissary list, confiscated all commissary items possessed by inmates but not listed on their purchase receipts. If an inmate purchased three packs of cigarettes but was found with ten, the additional seven packs were taken away. The extortion activity and the violence it generated came to a quick halt. On hearing this, the Commissioner praised the warden for his ingenuity and directed the program to be implemented system-wide.

It is important to note that staff responding at the TEAMS sessions are judged solely on the knowledge of their commands and their skills at problem-solving, not on their public speaking abilities or how well they recite numbers. Those unable to grasp the program are replaced. Conversely, those who embrace the TEAMS concept of accountability and results are promoted through the ranks. States Commissioner Kerik, “TEAMS has transformed the agency from one in which management was forever passive and reactive, going from one crisis to another always in a response mode. We are now an agency taking the initiative, making the moves, as we achieve the goal of jail safety and security for both inmates and staff. We have shaped TEAMS to work our will and enhance our ability to really run the system, not be run by it.”

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